



Jesus' warnings of his return and judgment in Luke 12 are similar to John the Baptist's preaching in Luke 3:7-18, though the emphases are reversed. In Luke 12 Jesus begins with the servants' relationship with their master and the good things they can expect when he returns to find them ready. Then comes the warning for the disobedient servants. In contrast, John the Baptist begins with a warning of judgment for people who think they have it all together and concludes with the promise of the Messiah's coming and the Spirit's power.

Like many today, the people of John's day assume that since they are prospering that they must be doing pretty well. The problem is that their prosperity comes from self-promotion (they are special children of Abraham) and taking advantage of others, not God's blessing. The tax collectors and soldiers are representative of people who seek to gain at others' expense and care little for others in their abundance. As they take John's warning to heart, their question is "What should we do then?" The answer is simple, be generous and care for others instead of being self-centered. Don't steal, extort, or take advantage of others, but serve them instead.

But John doesn't stop with changed behavior, and the people even recognize that the more important question is their relationship with the master, the Messiah. Their behavior is symptomatic of the more important concerns of the heart. John is addressing external washing and behavior, but he knows that the Messiah comes in power to assess our motives and standing with the master. He will baptize with fire, meaning he will judge all of who we are, not just behavior. He will baptize with the Spirit, bringing conviction of sin and empowering his followers to serve those around them.

Unsurprisingly, in addressing both our hearts and our behavior, John's and Jesus' messages also align in their characterization as good. Despite the dire consequences involved, Luke describes John's message as "good news" because he is speaking truth and offering hope in the midst of their sinfulness. Everyone believes that the righteous should prosper and the wicked should receive their due, but we often overlook our own wickedness and miss God's continual work of restoration. Similarly, Jesus says "it will be good" for his servants who are ready and *watching* for him, meaning that they have the same values and motivation as the master in all their dealings. It also "will be good" for those servants whom he finds *doing* what they have been given by the master as a natural outgrowth of their changed hearts. Readiness for Jesus' first coming and his second coming both involve desiring him and doing his will.

Discussion Questions

Like the people of John's and Jesus' day, how do we take advantage of others even while claiming to be God's servants or people?

Why is service so important in identifying us as Jesus' servants? How does service help us align our priorities with the master's?

How are you most easily distracted by or preoccupied with daily life and the world around you? What can we do to be more spiritually alert and aware of our eternal destiny?